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Reagan condones aides' 'abuses,' Hart says

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Washington — In the harshest attack yet on President Reagan by a Democratic presidential contender, Senator Gary Hart of Colorado charged yesterday that Watergate-like corruption is rampant in the Reagan administration and accused the president of condoning it.

"Abuse of government has become a way of life in this administration, yet it seems to concern no one very much, including the president himself," Mr. Hart said. "I think it should."

In the last three years, "almost 50 high-ranking officials of the Reagan administration have faced serious allegations involving criminal wrongdoing, unethical behavior or abuses of power and privilege," he said. "These are not low- or middle-level bureaucrats. These are the most senior administration officials."

"The president must be called to account," Mr. Hart said. "Such a persistent pattern of wrongdoing can only suggest this president condones wrongdoing by subordinates. . . . It's time we challenged the president: If you don't know what is going on, you should; if you do know what's going on, you have betrayed the American people."

Mr. Hart spoke in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he was campaigning for support in Iowa's February 20 caucuses, the first in the nation. A text of the address was released by his campaign office here.

For weeks, Mr. Hart has been

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spiking his speeches with accusations of widespread corruption in the Reagan administration, but yesterday was the first time he, or any other candidate in the Democratic presidential contest, had concentrated an entire speech on the subject.

Mr. Hart took the step as part of his attempt to set himself apart from the other five contenders in the so-called second tier. In a speech Thursday, Mr. Hart called most of his competitors, including front-runners Walter F. Mondale and Senator John H. Glenn, Jr., "establishment politicians" similar to Mr. Reagan.

Mr. Hart, who characterizes himself as the candidate of a "new generation," was not subtle in linking the Reagan administration and the Watergate scandals of the Nixon administration.

He called Watergate "the worst political scandal in our nation's history. . . . Now, 10 years later, the lessons of that traumatic period in our history seem to have been forgotten. Once again, we are hearing about political hit lists, about secrecy oaths and lie detectors, about favoritism in high places, about illicit taping of of-

ficial conversations and about lying by senior administration officials.

"Once again, government officials are betraying the public trust they hold. And once again, allegations of official misconduct are followed by pronouncements of presidential confidence and support."

The senator devoted nearly half his speech to listing the alleged wrongdoers in the Reagan administration, citing CIA Director William J. Casey for refusing to put his investments in a blind trust and presidential counselor Edwin W. Meese III for arranging a loan from a man later appointed to the Postal Service Commission. Mr. Reagan last week nominated Mr. Meese as attorney general.

Mr. Hart also named Paul Thayer, the deputy defense secretary who quit the day before he was charged by the Securities and Exchange Commission with illegal stock-dealing, and Michael K. Deaver, White House deputy chief of staff, for using his "White House celebrity to promote a diet book and arrange a contract for its sale."

"Many other examples exist," the senator said, "but the point is clear. . . . Such a record demonstrates contempt for the public trust."

In this country, he said, "we can no longer tolerate an administration which keeps people in office as long as they cannot be found guilty of criminal offenses. . . . It's time the responsibility be placed on the administration's chief executive, the man ultimately responsible for the behavior of his appointees."